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Joint Board Matter

Chairman Bulova
Supervisor McKay
Supervisor Gross

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Madam Chairman—if we ever needed proof that the federal government doesn't know what its right and left hands are doing—we've got it now.

We are braced for the coming disaster in September when thousands of BRAC workers try to commute to the Mark Center. VDOT's own traffic studies show near gridlock conditions will occur on Seminary Road, Beauregard Street, and I-395. The glimmer of hope that we will have some relief by the end of 2014 is about to be extinguished with the Federal decision to require an Environmental Assessment (EA) for the proposed I-395 ramp at Seminary Road. This ramp will move carpools and buses from I-395 to the Mark Center and while not a perfect solution, it will ease some of the gridlock. Our Board is very sensitive to environmental concerns and wants those issues fully addressed. We are hopeful both goals can be fully accomplished; an environmentally sensitive project and one done quickly.

The Federal decision to require an EA rather than a Categorical Exclusion (CE) will delay the ramp by up to 18 months. With a CE, VDOT would begin construction of the ramp under a design-build contract with completion by 2014. VDOT believes that a CE is the appropriate level of environmental documentation because the ramp will be built entirely within the existing I-395 right-of-way. The ramp will improve air quality in our non-attainment area by making transit and carpooling more convenient for Mark Center employees.

By the end of this year, 6,400 Department of Defense employees will be relocated to the Mark Center. Choosing the Mark Center for a BRAC site was absurd. Throwing additional roadblocks to getting to it *and* to our already gridlocked road system is beyond absurd.

Madam Chairman-- I ask that staff draft a letter from you to the Federal Highway Administration and our congressional delegation expressing our grave concern about any delays to the construction of this ramp and urging that all efforts be taken to hasten completion of the environmental review.